

HABS  
CAL  
1-BERK  
2-

Berkeley City Hall (Old City Hall)  
2134 Grove Street  
Berkeley  
Alameda County  
California

HABS No. CA-417

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

## CITY HALL PROJECT

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION  
ON THE BERKELEY CITY HALLHABS  
CAL,  
1-BERK  
2 -

Prepared by Trish Hawthorne, 9/1/81

Name: Berkeley City Hall (original name)  
Old City Hall (secondary name and present name)

Location: 2134 Grove Street, (Grove between Allston and Center)  
Berkeley (Alameda County), California

Present Owner: City of Berkeley

Present Occupant: Berkeley Unified School District

Present Use: School District Administrative Offices

Significance:

- a) Architectural significance: The Berkeley City Hall has architectural significance as a notable example of Beaux-Arts design and as an early work by the firm of Bakewell and Brown, who were leaders in Beaux-Arts design, especially of municipal buildings.
- b) Historical significance: The historical significance of the building is derived from its use as the home of Berkeley city government from 1909 to 1977, and from its current use as the meeting place of both the City Council and the Board of Education.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1908-1909  
Cornerstone laying ceremonies: June 27, 1908  
Dedication date: August 29, 1909

2. Architects: John Bakewell and Arthur Brown, Jr.

This is documented by their names on the plans, and by the extensive mention of their firm in local newspapers after their plans were selected for the new town hall in 1907.

Both John Bakewell (1872-1963) and Arthur Brown, Jr. (1874-1957) graduated from the University of California in the 1890's and went to Paris to attend the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. They formed a partnership in 1906 which continued until 1927. Their work includes many residential and public buildings. The Berkeley City Hall was one of their earliest commissions, and they went on to design the San Francisco City Hall (1912-1916), the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Station in San Diego (1915), the Pasadena City Hall (1925) and Coit Tower (1929). Arthur Brown was the principle designer for the firm, and was responsible for the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House (1932), and the San Francisco War Memorial Veteran's

Building (1932). He gained international renown for his Department of Labor and Interstate Commerce Commission Buildings (1935) in Washington, D.C., part of the Federal Triangle.

3. Contractor: Rickon-Ehrhart Construction Company
4. Original Plans and Construction:

The building is much like it was originally. The main facade has not been significantly altered.

Contemporary Descriptions:

Berkeley Daily Gazette, July 3, 1907:

"The building is in the style of the French Renaissance. It will be 152 feet long by 80 feet wide....The building will be situated on the northwest corner of Allston Way and Grove Street, as the city now owns practically the entire block. The building will face Grove Street.... On all sides will be lawns and flower gardens, with broad walks leading from the sidewalks to the various entrances.

The hall will be two stories high, with an attic and basement. It will be constructed with two wings, one to the north and one to the south. The stone steps leading up to the entrance will be the width of the main building, leading to a broad terrace which will also extend the full length of the structure....Six tall and graceful columns will rise from the ground floor to the roof lending an air of majesty to the structure."

Berkeley Daily Gazette, June 27, 1908:

"The architectural style of the building is a modern adaptation of the classic style. As there at present is rarely an opportunity to use this monumental architecture except in municipal buildings, it might be called, with reason, the municipal style of architecture."

5. Alterations and additions:

The only change to the main facade has been the replacement of the original wooden sash with aluminum, but the pattern of the muntins has been retained. The major exterior alteration occurred in 1950, when the rear of the building was extended on each side of the stair of the stair bay to create additional office space. Unfortunately, the windows on either side of the stair bay were enclosed as part of this work, so that the main staircase is much darker now than it was originally. The alteration had no effect on the appearance of the building from Grove Street, and the architectural integrity of the building remains.

The interior has been remodeled several times, but the major public spaces have not been greatly changed.

## B. Historical Context:

Berkeley was incorporated in 1878 and for the next six years was without a proper town hall. The town hall was migratory during those years, and meetings of the town's governing body, the Board of Trustees, were held in rented rooms in various locations in East and West Berkeley, the two centers of population at that time. The town hall's habitual and frequent mobility caused much irritation, and finally in 1884 a simple structure designed by Samuel and J. Cather Newsom was built on the corner of University Avenue and Sacramento Street. This was a compromise location half-way between the settled areas of the town, and not satisfactory. In 1899, this building was moved to Grove Street between Allston Way and Center Street, closer to the downtown district. This site is occupied by the current City Hall. In 1904, the wooden town hall burned to the ground, and town records were destroyed with it.

Once again rooms were rented for city use and in 1906 the city purchased additional land adjoining the Grove Street site and made plans for a new town hall that would be suitable for the growing community and a "safe depository for public records."

A competition was held to select the design for the new building. In June of 1907, it was announced that the winning design had been submitted by the firm of Bakewell and Brown. Bakewell and Brown's design was derived from the Town Hall in Tours, France, designed by Arthur Brown's teacher at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, M. LaLoux. The classic style of the proposed building proclaimed the city's new image as the "Athens of the West", due in part to the Hearst Plan for the University of California campus and the large classic buildings rising there. The city did not want to be left behind the University.

Cornerstone laying ceremonies were held on June 27, 1908, when the building was already under construction. A white granite cornerstone, filled with a copper box containing documents and mementos, was put in place with appropriate pomp in Masonic ceremonies.

By the time the new building was ready to be occupied in August of 1909, a new charter had been adopted and Berkeley had officially become a city. What had been begun as the town hall was now the city hall. All city services and functions were located in the new building. The Police Department was in the basement, as were the Fire Department and medical services. The main floor housed the financial, clerical and engineering departments. On the second floor were the City Council chambers, the offices of the School Board, the Mayor's office, the judicial chambers, and the legislative and judicial departments.

In the years after the City Hall was completed, the population of Berkeley increased dramatically. By 1960, there were over 100,000 people in the city, compared with the 40,000 who lived there when the City Hall was built in 1908. One result of this growth in population was the need for more space for various city departments and services. Over the years, many of these were moved into buildings

of their own in the area adjoining City Hall. The Hall of Justice, built in 1938 for the Police Department, and the Berkeley Albany Municipal Court, built in 1961 for the judicial services, are two examples of how growing services were accommodated. The size of City Hall itself was not increased much during this time, and in 1977, due to lack of space, city offices themselves were moved to the former Farm Credit Building (1938) at 2180 Milvia, just one block to the east of City Hall. The building stood vacant for almost three years, and in 1980 the Berkeley Unified School District leased City Hall from the city for 30 years and used it for its administrative headquarters. The school district currently occupies the building, which is now known as Old City Hall.

The completion of City Hall in 1909 provided the impetus for the first of many civic center plans in Berkeley. Berkeley citizens felt that such a grand building in the classic style deserved an appropriately planned public space around it. This was an outgrowth of the "City Beautiful Movement" with its emphasis on broad vistas and the grouping of public buildings around a large open space or park. Although the Berkeley Civic Center did not become a reality until 1941, because the city was slow in acquiring the land in the block bounded by Grove, Milvia, Allston and Center Streets, the intervening years saw several proposals for the new civic center. In his 1914 Report on a City Plan for the Municipalities of Oakland and Berkeley, Werner Hegemann recommended an open square bounded by public buildings between the streets listed above. In 1941, this concept became a reality. It should be noted that such well-known architects as Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan served on the Civic Center planning committee. Today Old City Hall remains the keystone of the Berkeley Civic Center.

## PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. Description of Exterior

The Berkeley City Hall is a Beaux-Arts building in the French Renaissance tradition. It is two stories high, with additional attic and basement, and is built of steel-reinforced concrete and finished with stucco. It is basically U-shaped, with a semi-circular stair bay in the rear. A symetrically composed building, it is divided into three parts: a central element flanked by two smaller elements or end pieces, which jut forward to the north and south of the central element.

The principle facade faces east and is the most impressive. The main entrance is approached via a spreading central stairway, which leads to a broad balustraded terrace spanning the front of the central element.

This central element (86' by 66') is divided into five bays. The ground floor has round arch openings with molded architraves. The wood framed sash has a triple horizontal and vertical division. The windows have shallow balconies faced with classical balustrades. The keystones of the arches abut shallow balconies projecting from the rectangular windows of the second floor.

The two main floors rise from a raised fenestrated basement. The central element has six engaged giant order-length columns with ionic capitals which support six

projecting cornice elements that serve as bases for ornamental dentils and monumental urns. Behind the urns is a blank frieze terminating in a secondary cornice molding, with a cartouche in the center. The central element has a raised, hipped roof with ornamental flames at either end of a central capped ridge.

The climactic moment is a 60' lantern and spire. The lantern rises from the roof with a paneled base terminating in a high metal balustrade around an open colonade. The colonade supports a classic entablature crowned by a narrow dome with engaged piers capped with finials. Atop the dome is a beveled spire on a base of graduated moldings.

The two wings (each 31' by 77') of the building are identical and are set perpendicular to the central portion. The details of the wings are much the same as those of the central element. The ground floor of each wing has round arch openings. These are framed by cartouches topped by lion masques from which rise brackets supporting the second floor balconies. The three rectangular windows on the second floor of each wing are smaller than those of the central element. One balcony spans all three of these windows and is faced with a metal balustrade. Each end piece has a hipped roof capped with a metal ridge with ornamental flames at either end.

The stucco of the building is painted light brown. The lantern and spire are painted dark brown, as is the sash.

#### B. Description of Interior

The main entrance to the building gives access to an ample hallway at the rear of which is a large and imposing stairway. The corridors which run off each side are very wide and are trimmed with marble wainscot. They give direct access to the offices on this floor.

On the floor above, directly at the top of the stairway, is the council chamber, which occupies the central portion of the building, while the wings on this floor are devoted to office space.

The most striking feature of the interior is a broad U-shaped stairway that leads up to the second floor. This grand two-flighted stairway has a banister of wrought iron, similar to the railings of the exterior balconies, decorated with gold-colored medallions. The rest of the grandeur is a skillful illusion. What appear to be walls of dressed stone and a ceiling of tooled leather and brocaded tapestry are a product of expert craftsmanship. While the marble wainscoting of the main floor is real, the rest is a trompe d'oeil. The two columns at the base of the stairwell look like marble, but are actually scagliola, a combination of gypsum, glue and coloring that imitates marble. The walls and ceiling of the stairwell are not stone, leather or tapestry, but are actually finished with plaster that has been painted in tones of red, olive, green, cream and gilt to resemble more expensive materials. All of this decorative work is original, and has not been changed. These are perfectly preserved examples of a type of decoration that was popular in public buildings at the turn of the century.

#### C. Site

The building faces east and is set back from the street about 30 feet. It is surrounded by a landscaped garden with lawn and ornamental shrubbery on the east and south.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

The 1907 plans for the building are located in the Records Vault, City of Berkeley, Department of Public Works, Engineering Division, Civic Center Building, 2180 Milvia Street, Berkeley, Ca. 94704.

B. Early Views:

1. Photograph of building under construction, 1908  
Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
1950 Addison Street, Berkeley, Ca. 94704
2. Photograph of building shortly after completion, c. 1910  
Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association  
1950 Addison Street, Berkeley, Ca. 94704
3. Photograph of building, c. 1930  
Berkeley Historical Society  
1414 Walnut Street, Berkeley, Ca. 94709
4. Postcard views through the years  
Ken Stein Collection  
Berkeley Public Library, Main Branch  
Shattuck at Kittredge  
Berkeley, Ca. 94704

C. Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

- a. Berkeley Daily Gazette: January 21, 1907 p.1; June 27, 1907, p.1; July 3, 1907, p.1; December 12, 1907, p.1; June 27, 1908, p.1
- b. Architect and Engineer, June 1907
- c. The Independent and Gazette, May 23, 1979 "City Hall A Neglected Landmark", by Anthony Bruce
- d. Original Blueprints, as listed above
- e. Permit File on 2134 Grove Street, Berkeley, includes dates, costs and description of exterior and interior alterations to the building; City of Berkeley Department of Housing and Development, Codes and Inspection Division, Civic Center Building, 2180 Milvia, Berkeley, Ca. 94704

2. Secondary Sources

- a. Documentation prepared for City of Berkeley landmark status for City Hall, 2134 Grove Street, by Janet Silber, December, 1975
- b. State Historical Resources Inventory form on City Hall, 2134 Grove Street, prepared by Betty Marvin, 1977

- c. National Register of Historic Places Nomination form,  
prepared by Trish Hawthorne, 1980
  - d. Ferrier, William Warren, Berkeley, California, 1933 p. 172-174
  - e. Hegemann, Werner, Report on a City Plan for the Municipalities  
of Oakland and Berkeley, 1915
  - f. Pettitt, George A., Berkeley: The Town And Gown Of It, 1973
- D. Likely sources not yet investigated: None that I am aware of.

Prepared by:

Trish Hawthorne  
Architectural and Historical Consultant  
Member, Berkeley Landmarks Commission  
September 1, 1981